

POSITION PAPER
INITIAL MEETING OF THE
UN COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL
USES OF OUTER SPACE

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March 14, 1962

ANNEX F

US MILITARY SPACE ACTIVITIES

(To be used only on foreign initiative)

BACKGROUND AND ANTICIPATED FOREIGN POSITION

1. During the meeting of the UN Outer Space Committee the Soviet Union and possibly others may attack US space programs and the manner in which they are being conducted. Charges such as the following may be made:

(a) that the United States is using outer space for aggressive military purposes, in particular for espionage; the DISCOVERER, SAMOS, MIDAS and possible TIROS programs might be cited in this regard;

(b) that the United States is "polluting" outer space with scientifically unnecessary and undesirable programs; the Project WEST FORD experiment and the DISCOVERER program might be used as examples; and

(c) that the United States is conducting its space programs in an irresponsible manner and endangering other countries; attention might be called to impacts, during the launching phase, of United States space vehicles in Cuba and South Africa.

2. On the basis set forth below and drawing on the separate position paper on Project WEST FORD (dated March 14, 1962), the United States Delegation should reject charges of aggressive programs, "pollution" of space, and irresponsible conduct. Should attempts be made to place limitations on United States space activities, the United States Delegation should seek further instructions from the Department in the case of any specific proposals not covered herein.

THE US POSITION

3. Military use of space -- The US is engaged in a broadly-based outer space effort having as its objectives the advancement of spaceflight technology and techniques, the extension of scientific knowledge through space research and exploration, and the development of practical applications of space vehicles in fields such as communications, observation, and navigation. In conducting this effort we are drawing on the resources of our defense agencies as well as those of our civilian space agency. As far as we know, the Soviet space program also draws on military support.

4. US military space efforts are contributing in all three basic areas of the US program: technology and techniques, scientific knowledge, and practical applications. In the latter area, the US, as is well-known, is

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investigating the possibility that some types of space activities might serve defense purposes as well as civilian purposes. It is natural that we should investigate such possibilities.

5. The types of activities we are investigating from the standpoint of their possible usefulness for defense purposes are non-aggressive in character. Their performance would not interfere with other activities being conducted on the earth or in outer space. The fact that military authorities are involved in or conduct certain space activities does not alter the non-aggressive character of these activities or make them "unpeaceful". Moreover, advances in such areas as communications, observation, and navigation will have civilian as well as military benefits regardless of which component of the US space program conducts them. Some of these advances could also in time help with the implementation of disarmament agreements by increasing the efficiency of inspection and verification systems.

6. Consistent with the action taken by the Sixteenth General Assembly of the United Nations (Resolution 1721, XVI) calling on states to recognize the applicability of the UN Charter to outer space, we have used as a principal guide for all our space activities Article 2, Paragraph 4, of the Charter, which imposes the following obligation:

"All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

7. We are not certain what guide the Soviet Union has been using. Many space vehicles are, of course, launched by rockets originally developed for military missiles purposes; indeed, the conduct of space launchings is the most desirable way to use such rockets. However, one is constrained to wonder at the considerable lengths to which the Soviet Union has gone to stress the relationship between its space and weapons programs. Thus, in its statement of August 30, 1961 concerning its unilateral decision to break the ban on nuclear testing and to reopen the nuclear weapons race, the Soviet Union went out of its way to claim that its nuclear terror weapons could be delivered by rockets like those employed to place Majors Gagarin and Titov in orbit. In view of such a claim and the clear threat which it carries, any Soviet challenge regarding US space activities appears to put the shoe on the wrong foot.

8. The types of space activities engaged in by the United States military, however, should cause concern to no one. Indeed, it can be expected that advances in such areas as communications, observation, and navigation will have civilian as well as military benefit and will in time help support the enforcement of arms control and disarmament arrangements.

/9. "Pollution"

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9. "Pollution" of space -- Soviet propagandists have based charges of United States "pollution" of space principally on three grounds: the high altitude and hence long life of a number of United States satellites; the Project WEST FORD experiment, and the DISCOVERER program which has placed some 26 satellites in orbit.

10. The orbits of United States satellites are, of course, selected on the basis of the requirements of the experiments being performed. Some United States satellites will, indeed, be long-lived. However, this does not constitute "pollution" of space or, to put it more accurately, an unwarranted increase in space "traffic". As the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space noted in its 1959 report, the "traffic" problem is not in space itself but in the capacity of ground tracking networks. The UN registry with which the US is cooperating fully, represents a constructive step toward a cooperative effort to deal with any possible "traffic" problem.

11. Where satellites are large enough, they can be designed for recovery at the end of their useful lives. This technique was accomplished first by the United States and has been demonstrated a number of times in the DISCOVERER program, in which the United States seeks to work out many different engineering problems bearing on the design and use of advanced space vehicles. Clearly, many experiments are required to accomplish this.

12. Irresponsible conduct of space activities -- It is correct that in a few instances pieces of United States space vehicles have accidentally re-entered the earth's atmosphere from outer space during the launching phase and landed in the territory of other countries. All precautions had been taken to prevent such occurrences. Fortunately, no real damage was caused. We nevertheless regret these accidents and are making special efforts to avoid their repetition.

13. The questions of liability of launching countries for space accidents and the desirability of arrangements for returning space vehicles which have accidentally come down in the wrong place were discussed in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee. The United States is prepared to go into these matters during the course of the work of the Outer Space Committee.

DISCUSSION

14. Observation of the earth from outer space -- The making of observations of the earth from outer space is an established practice engaged in both by the Soviet Union and the US. Such activities are not only permissible but also desirable. They represent one of the most interesting uses of space vehicles and give promise of serving the international public interest as well as national interests.

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15. The usefulness of photographic equipment in satellites was first demonstrated by the Soviet satellite LUNIK III, which photographed the far side of the moon. The tens of thousands of photographs made available by the TIROS satellites of the US and used by many nations have clearly established the great practical value of cloud cover photography. VOSTOK II and the initial orbital flights of the Project MERCURY capsule have brought back glimpses of the earth as seen by travellers through space. The travellers themselves -- Majors Gagarin and Titov, Commander Shepard, Captain Grissom, and Colonel Glenn -- have had unique opportunities to view the earth from new vantage points in outer space.

16. Of all these activities to date, the TIROS satellites perhaps best illustrate the types of public benefits resulting from observation of the earth from outer space. The experimental TIROS satellites are the forerunners of systems which will improve weather forecasting for the benefit of all. Indeed, as data have been received, they have already been put to good use internationally. During the fall of 1961, the US sponsored a workshop to instruct others in the use of photographs received from the TIROS satellites. Representatives of some 30 countries attended. We invited Soviet bloc countries to join in this cooperative effort, but they did not do so. We regret this and believe their scientists must regret it also. The U.S. also initiated steps in the UN to encourage further advances in meteorology and its use for man's benefit.

17. Improved photography will be available from future satellites and may contribute to the performance of public service functions in support of resources surveys on a vast scale, engineering and development projects, and mapping remote areas. Improved capabilities could also be of use in support of the implementation of disarmament.

18. The act of observing the earth from outer space is a peaceful act. It is clear that neither on the basis of experience to date, nor the equipment involved, nor the types of non-interfering activities that can be performed does there exist any presumption against the propriety of placing instrumented or human observers in space. There are no existing barriers to observations made from outside the territorial limits of a state (e.g., from ships at sea), and it would be mischievous to try to erect such barriers in outer space. Furthermore, such attempts would be inconsistent with the action of the Sixteenth General Assembly in Resolution 1721, (XVI) which affirms the freedom of outer space for exploration and use by all states in conformity with international law.

19. In any event, any attempt to impose limits on observations from space would require the making of impossible judgments as to purpose and

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intent. Major Titov has said that it is possible from outer space "to distinguish rivers, mountains, and cultivated fields", but is it possible to distinguish between Major Titov as a space traveller and as an officer of the Soviet Air Force? Major Titov has also said that he "took a few photographs". One might ask who can confirm what his purpose was in doing so, but from the standpoint of the U.S. the question would be irrelevant since we cannot perceive any reason to object to the act of observing the earth from outer space. U.S. space activities have been peaceful, and thus far we are prepared to accept that the space activities of the Soviet Union, including photographing of the earth from outer space, have been peaceful also.

20. The real question is not whether activities such as these are permissible but whether weapons of mass destruction are to be placed in orbit. The U.S. has included in its disarmament proposals a measure to forestall this possibility. Pre-launch inspection is an implicit requirement of such a measure. Our desire for such a measure and our willingness to contemplate such inspection offer further assurance of the peaceful and non-aggressive character of our space programs.

21. The foregoing has not dealt specifically with three US military space programs (SAMOS, MIDAS, and DISCOVERER) which might be labeled by others as "spy satellites". It is believed that a generalized approach to the question of observing the earth from outer space may be more satisfactory than a "defense" of specific US military space programs. However, should specific comments be necessary, the approach set forth below may be utilized.

22. SAMOS -- The following description of the SAMOS program is based on official US announcements: the SAMOS program has the objective of improving capabilities for making observations from satellites orbiting in outer space; to this end, the the program involves test photographic equipment; it is in the stage of research and development, and its usefulness cannot be evaluated for some time. It has been publicly stated and may be repeated that in pursuing this program, we have very much in mind the possible application to disarmament of the type of capabilities which may in time be developed. However, these capabilities are still in the experimental stage. (The U.S. would not be prepared at this time to enter into any commitments to make available photographs which might at a future date be obtained as a result of further development of SAMOS; the US would also not be prepared at this time to accept "internationalization" of SAMOS.)

23. MIDAS -- The Missile Defense Alarm System (MIDAS) is being developed to provide a new means of detecting (by means of satellite-borne infra-red sensors) mass launches of inter-continental ballistic missiles. Strictly speaking, the system is not intended to observe the earth. Rather, it will

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look for missiles as they emerge from the atmosphere. However, the program has been associated in the press with SAMOS, and like SAMOS, MIDAS has been described as a "spy satellite".

24. MIDAS is in essence an extension of and supplement to the land-based radars of the Ballistic Missile Early Warning Systems (BMEWS). Its role is purely defensive, and it could present a problem only to a nation desiring to be able to launch a surprise attack. If the Soviet Union is itself concerned, as it has claimed, about the possibility of an attack from the West, we would encourage the Soviet Union to develop its own MIDAS.

25. It should be remembered that MIDAS, when it becomes available, will work with BMEWS to increase the amount of information available from all sources. Such an increase of information should make even more unlikely the possibility of surprise attack on the one hand and help avoid the danger of erroneous interpretation of events on the other. Like other types of observation capabilities, MIDAS-type satellites may in time provide useful support of disarmament.

26. DISCOVERER. This program has been associated by the press with both SAMOS and MIDAS and has itself been described as a "spy satellite". Attention has been focused on the large numbers of DISCOVERER launchings. The U.S. should state that the DISCOVERER program has as its objective the advancement of spaceflight technology and techniques. DISCOVERER is a "work-horse" of the U.S. program on which many types of experiments have been made. It will be recalled that it was the DISCOVERER program that first demonstrated the feasibility of recovering objects from orbit. Advances of this type have, in the view of the U.S., made the DISCOVERER program exceedingly worthwhile, and, of course, a large number of launches may be needed to make such major advances. (The US would not be prepared at this time to accept "internationalization" of DISCOVERER.)

27. "Unannounced" launchings — During the past several months, the U.S. has made some launchings of objects into outer space not identified by any specific program or project name. Because these launches were conducted without the usual presence of newsmen and only a brief announcement of launch was issued, news coverage of the launches used such terms as "secret launch", "unidentified satellite", etc. Attention may be called to these so-called "unannounced" launches during the meeting of the Outer Space Committee. If questions are raised regarding these launches and if it becomes necessary that the U.S. respond to such questions, the U.S. Delegation should point out that such launches are research and development efforts carrying classified test components. These projects are non-aggressive in character and pose no threat to any nation. In such cases, the launch is publicly announced but no further public releases are made. However, each such satellite vehicle

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achieving sustained orbit is reported to the UN under the registration procedures established under the provisions of the U.S.-sponsored resolution adopted last December. (The initial US registration included all objects in sustained orbit or space transit as of February 15, 1962.) These launchings are registered in the same detail as all other U.S. space launchings. Furthermore, where launchings of scientific interest occur, the U.S., as is well known, conducts such launchings in full view of the international public. The U.S. record in this regard is second to none and the U.S. believes that its general policy of considerable openness and wide-spread releases of results has made a substantial contribution to the understanding by other countries of the difficulties, complexities and potential of space flight.

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